

# Rural Tourism Marketing

## Chapter Three – Why Would Anyone Come Here?

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Mother Nature is a generous parent. She has been particularly gracious to California, giving us beautiful mountains, elegant coastlines, stark yet vibrant deserts and magnificent valleys.

Yet often, despite the surroundings, we find ourselves struggling as tourism marketers to come up with a reason for people to visit our area. We look at the places we vacation with our own families, and come to the conclusion that without a beach, or a mountain to climb, a stream to fish or a casino in which to gamble our area has nothing to offer the potential visitor.

It's an old saying, but if you're feeling that way it's time to step back so that you can see "the forest for the trees."

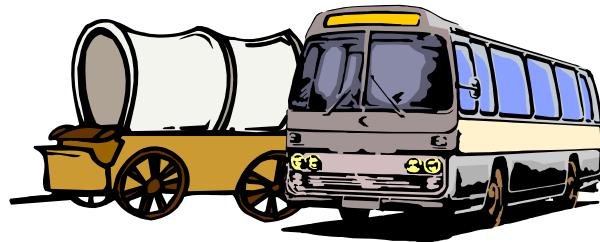
### Go o d b y e D e a t h V a l l e y !

More than 150 years ago, in 1849 to be exact, two families traveling by ox-drawn wagon became stranded in a desolate valley on their way to the California gold fields from Salt Lake City. While waiting for rescue, they slaughtered their oxen and burned their wagons to cook the meat. Eventually they were rescued (happy ending!) and as they were leaving the site of their entrapment they turned and cursed "Goodbye Death Valley!" and the name stuck.

Today, Death Valley is one of California's most famous visitor destinations. It is especially well known and popular with European travelers, who seek out its 125-degree summer days. Do you think that those in-

trepid pioneers of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century could have ever envisioned

busloads of German travelers coming half way around the world to vacation in the same place? If the pioneers had instead named it "Happy Valley," would it have the same allure?



Remember that tourism destinations can blossom in the unlikelyst of places.

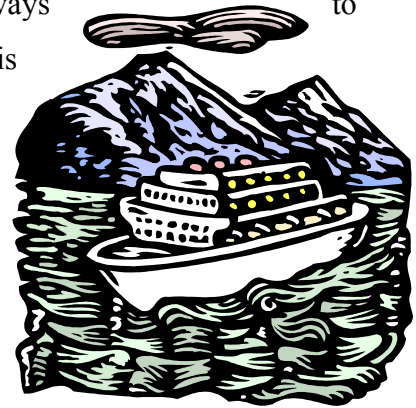
### Who Needs a Highway?

Avalon is a beautiful coastal community, nestled into a cove on the Pacific Ocean, just 22 miles from Los Angeles. The climate is mild, the scenery spectacular, and the fishing is world famous. It would seem to be the ideal tourist destination.

Except for one small problem. There are no roads or highways to Avalon. That's right, there is no way to get there by land, since it is located on Catalina Island. In order for visitors to see this charming village, they must travel by boat, or by small plane.

None-the-less, hundreds of thousands of visitors every year do exactly that, thanks largely to the summertime cruise ship industry and the privately operated boat services plying the waters on a daily basis. Why do visitors flock to Avalon?

Precisely *because* of the natural boundaries that had to first be overcome. It is remote, yet accessible with relative ease. You feel as if you are a world away from the big city, but you can be home in two hours.



But don't think that the high-speed boats, cruise ships and sailboats magically appeared. The destination that Catalina Island has become today was largely the dream of one man, William Wrigley, Jr. who had the vision, and (fortunately) the means to make it happen. In the 1920's, Wrigley (of chewing gum fame and fortune) wanted to develop the island as a resort, "a refuge from worry and work for the rich and poor" without destroying its natural beauty. Wrigley succeeded admirably; building a casino and creating regularly scheduled ferry service from the Los Angeles area to the island.

Although today numerous high-speed boats ply the waters between Avalon and several coastal ports, those charged with marketing Catalina Island as a visitor destination continue to concentrate on transportation issues as their main hurdle to even greater tourist numbers.

### Don't Take Your Rural setting for Granted

With no offense intended to the agricultural breadbasket of our state, Fresno might seem like an unlikely tourist destination.

Certainly it is only a couple of hours from Yosemite Valley and the spectacular Sierra Nevada, and the water skiing is great at nearby Millerton Lake, but why would anyone really want to visit the generally flat agricultural farmland of Fresno County?

That was the question faced by the Fresno City and County Convention & Visitors Bureau as it looked for a way to capitalize on its agricultural history and setting to attract more visitors.

The solution was “The Blossom Trail.”

In 1989, representatives of the Fresno CVB, the Chamber of Commerce and the Fresno County Farm Bureau held a meeting to discuss ways to promote “agricultural tourism.” Someone remembered the spectacular fall colors on the trees in New England and compared it to the beautiful spring blossoms in the orchards around Fresno. As the discussion evolved, it was decided to create a self-guided driving tour of the most spectacular orchards in the area.

They called it “The Blossom Trail,” and from that simple idea came what the American Bus Association has labeled one of the Top 100 tour bus attractions in the country.

Today, during a spectacular three-week window when almond, apple, peach and nectarine trees all bloom at once, thousands of tourists drive or bike the 62-mile route through Fresno County. Other nearby communities have capitalized on the success of the Blossom Tour with events such as the Blossom Days Festival in Sanger.

In Fresno, all it took was someone to see the trees through the forest.

### **Your Community Can be a Destination Too!**

The moral of the story is that anyplace can be a tourist destination with the right vision, development and positioning. Don’t try to hide or change that which makes your area or community special and distinct, but capitalize upon its uniqueness. Remember Visalia with its “Fog Festival?”

Your community is a product; a “tourist destination.” No amount of positioning or marketing can turn Merced into a ski resort, or Indio into a beach town. That’s not the point. The point is to recognize your area as it is, and as it can be.



Take a look now at your community as if you had never seen it before. As if you were a potential tourist looking for something to do, someplace to explore, somewhere to eat and somewhere to sleep. What you find may pleasantly surprise you!